

#SoAatHome | How I write – in conversation with Mary Beard

Thursday 10 July 2025



1

00:00:00,000--> 00:00:03,108

-Let's begin. Hello everyone,
and a very warm welcome

2

00:00:03,132--> 00:00:04,548

on this beautifully sunny day

3

00:00:04,572--> 00:00:08,000

to today's #SoAatHome event

4

00:00:08,000--> 00:00:11,868

entitled, How I Write, or
should I say, Quomodo scribo,

5

00:00:11,892--> 00:00:14,708

In conversation with
Professor Mary Beard.

6

00:00:14,732--> 00:00:16,868

And isn't it appropriate

7

00:00:16,892--> 00:00:18,868

that we should be

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holding this in July,

8

00:00:18,892--> 00:00:21,788

one of the two months

in the Gregorian calendar

9

00:00:21,812--> 00:00:25,628

named, of course, in

honour of Roman statesmen.

10

00:00:25,652--> 00:00:27,148

My name is Theo Jones

11

00:00:27,172--> 00:00:29,108

and I am a Contracts Advisor

12

00:00:29,132--> 00:00:31,676

here at the Society of Authors.

13

00:00:31,700--> 00:00:34,068

And I have a particular

interest in supporting members

14

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00:00:34,092--> 00:00:37,000

working across

TV, film, and stage.

15

00:00:37,000--> 00:00:40,828

I also co-produce and present

the SoA's Advisory Podcast,

16

00:00:40,852--> 00:00:44,188

which explores the key

topics, issues, and challenges

17

00:00:44,212--> 00:00:46,028

affecting authors today.

18

00:00:46,052--> 00:00:47,388

Do please check that out

19

00:00:47,412--> 00:00:49,428

if you have not already done so.

20

00:00:49,500--> 00:00:55,628

Now, today's event is part of our

#SoAatHome Spring/Summer 2025 programme.

21

00:00:55,652--> 00:00:57,588

It is free for all,

22

00:00:57,612--> 00:00:58,868

but if you can afford to,

23

00:00:58,892--> 00:01:02,500

please do consider donating to
the Society of Authors Access Fund

24

00:01:02,500--> 00:01:04,868

which provides grants to authors

25

00:01:04,892--> 00:01:07,500

so that travel,
subsistence, childcare costs,

26

00:01:07,500--> 00:01:10,668

and access needs
aren't barriers to authors

27

00:01:10,692--> 00:01:13,908

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taking part in events,

residencies, and retreats,

28

00:01:13,932--> 00:01:16,500

and we suggest a

minimum donation of £5.

29

00:01:16,500--> 00:01:19,628

My lovely colleague Lilly

is going to post the link

30

00:01:19,652--> 00:01:21,500

to that in the chat for you now.

31

00:01:21,500--> 00:01:24,988

You can also help the

Society of Authors Access Fund

32

00:01:25,012--> 00:01:29,068

by making a purchase on our

virtual bookstore on [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org),

33

00:01:29,092--> 00:01:33,500

where you can find books by writers

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taking part in the SoA at Home programme.

34

00:01:33,500--> 00:01:38,228

Now, we will be together
today for 45 minutes in total,

35

00:01:38,252--> 00:01:40,108

to include rather wonderfully

36

00:01:40,132--> 00:01:41,693

both a short reading
by Professor Beard

37

00:01:41,717--> 00:01:44,068

from Emperor of Rome,

38

00:01:44,092--> 00:01:47,028

as well as a 10 to 15
minute Q&A to close.

39

00:01:47,052--> 00:01:50,268

Please do turn on the
closed captions option

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40

00:01:50,292--> 00:01:52,500

if you would like live

subtitles during this event.

41

00:01:52,500--> 00:01:55,788

The recording of the event

is going to be available

42

00:01:55,812--> 00:01:59,068

via our ever-popular

resources page on our website

43

00:01:59,092--> 00:02:02,500

and also on our Vimeo channel.

44

00:02:02,500--> 00:02:04,068

If you do have questions,

45

00:02:04,092--> 00:02:05,708

and I very much

hope that you will,

46

00:02:05,732--> 00:02:09,188

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please do post those in the
Q&A box as we go through

47

00:02:09,212--> 00:02:12,588

and you can do so
anonymously if you would prefer,

48

00:02:12,612--> 00:02:15,500

leaving the chat box there for
your more general comments.

49

00:02:15,500--> 00:02:19,468

And so, thankfully and happily,

50

00:02:19,492--> 00:02:21,388

that brings us to the
end of housekeeping.

51

00:02:21,412--> 00:02:23,428

Thank you so much
for bearing with me.

52

00:02:23,452--> 00:02:26,788

It is now time to introduce

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today's esteemed guest.

53

00:02:26,812--> 00:02:30,108

Now, one of the world's
best-known classicists,

54

00:02:30,132--> 00:02:31,988

Professor Mary Beard,

55

00:02:32,012--> 00:02:33,468

has written numerous books,

56

00:02:33,492--> 00:02:35,268

including the
prize-winning Pompeii,

57

00:02:35,292--> 00:02:36,800

which won the
Wolfson History Prize,

58

00:02:36,824--> 00:02:41,668

the best-selling SPQR and
Women and Power: A Manifesto.

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59

00:02:41,692--> 00:02:43,828

Mary is a regular
media commentator,

60

00:02:43,852--> 00:02:45,348

committed blogger,

61

00:02:45,372--> 00:02:48,500

including for the TLS where she
holds the role of Classics editor,

62

00:02:48,500--> 00:02:52,468

and has made many highly
acclaimed television documentaries

63

00:02:52,492--> 00:02:53,500

on the ancient world

64

00:02:53,500--> 00:02:57,228

with which I'm sure many
of you joining us today

65

00:02:57,252--> 00:02:59,500

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will no doubt be familiar.

66

00:02:59,500--> 00:03:01,388

Her latest book,
Emperor of Rome,

67

00:03:01,412--> 00:03:04,188

delves into the world
of that extraordinary role,

68

00:03:04,212--> 00:03:08,548

a work heralded as
"beautiful" by Rory Stewart,

69

00:03:08,572--> 00:03:10,308

"magisterial" by the FT,

70

00:03:10,332--> 00:03:14,500

and with its author hailed "the reigning
Queen of Classics" by The Spectator.

71

00:03:14,500--> 00:03:18,828

Mary, thank you so much for
sparing this time to be with us today.

72

00:03:18,852--> 00:03:21,788

It's such an honour and great
privilege for me personally,

73

00:03:21,812--> 00:03:24,228

so thank you very much indeed.

74

00:03:24,252--> 00:03:26,188

And so, "the reigning
Queen of Classics",

75

00:03:26,212--> 00:03:28,588

a welcome accreditation

76

00:03:28,612--> 00:03:30,500

or would you perhaps
rather this, from the FT,

77

00:03:30,500--> 00:03:35,548

who call you the "Rockstar
Scholar of Ancient Rome"?

78

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00:03:35,572--> 00:03:39,308

-Oh, wow, I think I'll have the
Rockstar Scholar, thanks very much.

79

00:03:39,332--> 00:03:42,500

I think reigning Queen of Classic
sounds a bit terrifying. [laughs]

80

00:03:44,012--> 00:03:46,388

-Now, on the subject of
these grand distinctions,

81

00:03:46,412--> 00:03:49,308

not only are you a
British Academy Fellow

82

00:03:49,332--> 00:03:51,708

and member of the
American Academy of Arts,

83

00:03:51,732--> 00:03:53,508

but you're also a fellow,

84

00:03:53,532--> 00:03:55,788

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newly appointed of
the Society of Authors,

85

00:03:55,812--> 00:03:57,788

and I just wondered
whether you would...

86

00:03:57,812--> 00:03:59,388

You might like to
say a few words

87

00:03:59,412--> 00:04:02,228

about what meaning
this role holds for you.

88

00:04:02,252--> 00:04:04,468

-Oh, it's hugely
important for me.

89

00:04:04,492--> 00:04:07,500

Um, and I think that

90

00:04:07,500--> 00:04:12,308

people tend, from the outside,

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to take writers a bit for granted.

91

00:04:12,332--> 00:04:14,628

You know, they see... they
see the books in the shops,

92

00:04:14,652--> 00:04:17,548

they sort of think they're
slightly nerdy types,

93

00:04:17,572--> 00:04:20,228

who sit at home writing,

94

00:04:20,252--> 00:04:21,908

because that's
all they want to do.

95

00:04:21,932--> 00:04:24,500

And I think from the
outside, people forget how

96

00:04:24,500--> 00:04:28,748

difficult it can be, what
kind of support you need.

97

00:04:28,772--> 00:04:31,628

And something like
the Society of Authors

98

00:04:31,652--> 00:04:33,628

is so important for that, so...

99

00:04:33,652--> 00:04:37,348

To me, it was hugely,
hugely an honour

100

00:04:37,372--> 00:04:40,268

to, you know, become
someone who could actually

101

00:04:40,292--> 00:04:43,436

do their bit in speaking
up for authors who need it.

102

00:04:44,500--> 00:04:48,228

-Now, members joining
us today will, of course,

103

00:04:48,252--> 00:04:51,868

all be writers of varying
persuasions and disciplines,

104

00:04:51,892--> 00:04:54,188

and at varying
stages of their career.

105

00:04:54,212--> 00:04:57,500

But all united, of course, by
an interest in you and of course...

106

00:04:57,500--> 00:05:02,268

But perhaps more specifically, your
creative routine and your creative work.

107

00:05:02,292--> 00:05:04,200

And I wonder whether
you could tell us

108

00:05:04,224--> 00:05:07,200

what the writing of a book,
such as Emperor of Rome,

109

00:05:07,200--> 00:05:09,948

means for you in
terms of the daily routine

110

00:05:09,972--> 00:05:11,588

of putting the project together?

111

00:05:11,612--> 00:05:13,588

Is there anything you
need in order to write?

112

00:05:13,612--> 00:05:15,628

Do you have
essential daily rituals?

113

00:05:15,652--> 00:05:18,200

What does your
workspace look like?

114

00:05:18,200--> 00:05:20,148

-Well, I'm sitting
in my workspace,

115

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00:05:20,172--> 00:05:22,268

which you can see, um,

116

00:05:22,292--> 00:05:25,548

is a small, book-lined room

117

00:05:25,572--> 00:05:28,388

and the bust that you

can see behind me

118

00:05:28,412--> 00:05:32,308

is a bust... a 19th century,

rather cheap 19th century bust

119

00:05:32,332--> 00:05:34,748

of the Greek poet Sappho.

120

00:05:34,772--> 00:05:40,108

Um, so there's a bit of a kind of

emblem of female creativity there

121

00:05:40,132--> 00:05:42,108

and I'm just gonna

turn this around,

122

00:05:42,132--> 00:05:43,200

and you can see that

123

00:05:43,200--> 00:05:46,748

just outside, there's

a little garden, so...

124

00:05:46,772--> 00:05:50,076

This is where I

hole up to write.

125

00:05:50,100--> 00:05:52,548

You told me you were going

to ask something like that, Theo,

126

00:05:52,572--> 00:05:56,200

and I find it very,

very difficult to...

127

00:05:56,200--> 00:05:58,308

to answer, because...

128

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00:05:58,332--> 00:06:03,200

Everything is kind of internalized.

129

00:06:03,200--> 00:06:05,708

You know, have I got

a lot of other things on.

130

00:06:05,732--> 00:06:08,288

I've always had a lot of other

things on apart from writing,

131

00:06:08,312--> 00:06:10,428

and I used to teach at

University of Cambridge,

132

00:06:10,452--> 00:06:12,200

and so writing had

to fit around that.

133

00:06:12,200--> 00:06:14,908

Um, now I've retired from that.

134

00:06:14,932--> 00:06:17,548

I've still got

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lots of things on.

135

00:06:17,572--> 00:06:21,428

So, I... I have no
regular routine, I confess.

136

00:06:21,452--> 00:06:22,548

None at all.

137

00:06:22,572--> 00:06:25,068

Except, if I'm
writing something,

138

00:06:25,092--> 00:06:27,548

what I do is I get out of bed,

139

00:06:27,572--> 00:06:31,200

I put my dressing gown
on, I make some coffee,

140

00:06:31,200--> 00:06:33,028

I don't get dressed.

141

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00:06:33,052--> 00:06:35,948

Um, I come into this little room

142

00:06:35,972--> 00:06:39,200

where I've got a kind of
small little chaise longue.

143

00:06:39,200--> 00:06:43,588

And I just sit there, and I sit there
until I've got something else to do.

144

00:06:43,612--> 00:06:45,028

And...

145

00:06:45,052--> 00:06:47,668

I have no

146

00:06:47,692--> 00:06:49,200

magic formula.

147

00:06:49,200--> 00:06:52,708

Um, I have very
limited ambitions.

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148

00:06:52,732--> 00:06:55,200

I mean, I think that...

149

00:06:55,200--> 00:06:58,348

I suppose I've learned that

150

00:06:58,372--> 00:07:00,200

if, at the end of the day,

151

00:07:00,200--> 00:07:02,948

I'm 500 words further on

152

00:07:02,972--> 00:07:05,068

than I was at the

beginning of the day,

153

00:07:05,092--> 00:07:08,200

I can go and have a glass of
wine and feel it was a success.

154

00:07:08,200--> 00:07:10,188

You know, it's horrible.

155

00:07:10,212--> 00:07:11,828

I mean, everybody
knows this feeling.

156

00:07:11,852--> 00:07:14,908

You know, what it feels like when
you've struggled and struggled,

157

00:07:14,932--> 00:07:17,200

and then you've just
deleted the last 10 pages.

158

00:07:17,200--> 00:07:19,628

Um, you know,
that's the nightmare.

159

00:07:19,652--> 00:07:23,708

2,000 words in a
day is a kind of..

160

00:07:23,732--> 00:07:26,200

a dream that I've never reached.

161

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00:07:26,200--> 00:07:29,108

And I've just kind
of.... You know, I'm...

162

00:07:29,132--> 00:07:32,200

I'm happy as long as I'm
moving in the right direction.

163

00:07:32,200--> 00:07:35,228

And all I need is coffee
and a bit of alcohol

164

00:07:35,252--> 00:07:37,200

when it gets to the evening.

165

00:07:37,200--> 00:07:40,148

Um, and it's best when
I'm in my dressing gown.

166

00:07:40,172--> 00:07:41,200

[laughs]

167

00:07:41,200--> 00:07:44,908

-Fantastic, and I've, this morning,

been re-reading a passage

168

00:07:44,932--> 00:07:48,428

from your book, all around

theatrical dining areas

169

00:07:48,452--> 00:07:50,628

that appear to have

played such an integral,

170

00:07:50,652--> 00:07:52,200

although at times brutal,

171

00:07:52,200--> 00:07:54,428

role in the ancient Roman world

172

00:07:54,452--> 00:07:56,501

and I suppose this is

quite a tenuous link at best,

173

00:07:56,525--> 00:07:58,708

but I wonder...

174

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00:07:58,732--> 00:08:00,748

You know, you
say that you write,

175

00:08:00,772--> 00:08:02,200

this is your writing space,

176

00:08:02,200--> 00:08:05,268

to what extent do
you take inspiration

177

00:08:05,292--> 00:08:07,188

from your external surroundings

178

00:08:07,212--> 00:08:08,748

as part of your
creative process?

179

00:08:08,772--> 00:08:10,808

You've got a very beautiful
room there, but do you

180

00:08:10,832--> 00:08:12,868

walk out into the garden

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and take inspiration

181

00:08:12,892--> 00:08:14,200

from what you have

182

00:08:14,200--> 00:08:15,200

around you in that space?

183

00:08:15,200--> 00:08:19,868

-I'm going to sound

terrible, you know, that...

184

00:08:19,892--> 00:08:21,388

Actually, no, really.

185

00:08:21,412--> 00:08:25,200

I mean, if I've got a comfy

chair, a power supply,

186

00:08:25,200--> 00:08:27,708

and a laptop, and

a cup of coffee,

187

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00:08:27,732--> 00:08:30,148

I could be anywhere, honestly.

188

00:08:30,172--> 00:08:33,200

I mean, you know,
there is a pleasure to...

189

00:08:33,200--> 00:08:35,708

kind of working in
a book-lined study.

190

00:08:35,732--> 00:08:37,200

Yeah, there is, in a way, but...

191

00:08:37,200--> 00:08:38,508

But I don't think...

192

00:08:38,532--> 00:08:40,348

I don't think it's
the essential.

193

00:08:40,372--> 00:08:42,300

I mean, it's about being
reasonably comfortable,

194

00:08:42,324--> 00:08:45,388

having no problems

with the power,

195

00:08:45,412--> 00:08:48,200

and just getting down to it.

196

00:08:48,200--> 00:08:49,708

Um, so, so, you know,

197

00:08:49,732--> 00:08:52,508

I really wanted to

come out with, you know,

198

00:08:52,532--> 00:08:55,200

what I always do is, you know,

199

00:08:55,200--> 00:08:59,628

have a almond croissant

before I start or whatever,

200

00:08:59,652--> 00:09:02,301

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but I have no
rituals whatsoever.

201

00:09:02,325--> 00:09:03,325

[laughs]

202

00:09:03,349--> 00:09:05,788

Not that I recognise
and, of course,

203

00:09:05,812--> 00:09:07,200

other people might
say differently.

204

00:09:07,200--> 00:09:10,988

-Yeah. Um, now, Emperor of Rome

205

00:09:11,012--> 00:09:13,988

was born out of a course, I
think, that you taught in Cambridge

206

00:09:14,012--> 00:09:15,028

in the 1990s.

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207

00:09:15,052--> 00:09:19,200

The Roman Emperor construction
and deconstruction of an image.

208

00:09:19,200--> 00:09:23,468

And I wondered whether
you had any words

209

00:09:23,492--> 00:09:25,748

to say about the process
of research that has,

210

00:09:25,772--> 00:09:28,748

across that period and the
pulling together of that research

211

00:09:28,772--> 00:09:32,200

to craft the book that
we now have today.

212

00:09:32,200--> 00:09:35,200

-What I think is surprising
about that or what surprised me

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213

00:09:35,200--> 00:09:38,028

was that I did this course,

214

00:09:38,052--> 00:09:41,668

The Roman Emperor construction
and deconstruction of an image,

215

00:09:41,692--> 00:09:43,748

you know, and you can
tell it was in the 1990s,

216

00:09:43,772--> 00:09:46,988

because that's why it's called Construction
and Deconstruction of an image.

217

00:09:47,012--> 00:09:48,200

You know, I don't think...

218

00:09:48,200--> 00:09:49,988

I don't think we'd
call it that now.

219

00:09:50,012--> 00:09:53,348

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Um, and I'd always thought

220

00:09:53,372--> 00:09:55,200

I wanted to make
it a book. It was...

221

00:09:55,200--> 00:09:58,268

It was very exciting
when I did it

222

00:09:58,292--> 00:10:00,200

with a lot of very
smart students

223

00:10:00,200--> 00:10:02,908

and we had great
fun about thinking

224

00:10:02,932--> 00:10:05,908

about how Roman power worked,

225

00:10:05,932--> 00:10:07,748

what the nature
of autocracy was,

226

00:10:07,772--> 00:10:12,200

how you could parallel that
in other autocratic regimes.

227

00:10:12,200--> 00:10:14,108

Oh, and we had good
historiographical fun

228

00:10:14,132--> 00:10:16,828

in thinking about, well,
are all those stories

229

00:10:16,852--> 00:10:18,601

told about Roman emperors true?

230

00:10:18,625--> 00:10:21,548

And if they're not true,

231

00:10:21,572--> 00:10:24,988

what does a historian
do with those stories?

232

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00:10:25,012--> 00:10:26,868

And so, in many
ways, it was a kind

233

00:10:26,892--> 00:10:30,200

of post-truth history
kind of course.

234

00:10:30,200--> 00:10:34,388

And I wanted to develop it,

235

00:10:34,412--> 00:10:37,068

because the students
have been very keen

236

00:10:37,092--> 00:10:38,200

and it had...

237

00:10:38,200--> 00:10:42,388

It had changed the way I think I
thought about how you did history.

238

00:10:42,412--> 00:10:45,200

I mean, I'd always... I had,

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you know, I was in my 50s then.

239

00:10:45,200--> 00:10:47,588

I had always thought that

240

00:10:47,612--> 00:10:51,200

somehow the

historian's aim was to...

241

00:10:51,200--> 00:10:52,708

to get to the truth.

242

00:10:52,732--> 00:10:54,908

And it was really

during that course

243

00:10:54,932--> 00:10:57,708

where I thought, look,

that's only one aim,

244

00:10:57,732--> 00:11:00,188

you know, and truth

comes in many forms

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245

00:11:00,212--> 00:11:03,200

and there's symbolic
truth and literal truth.

246

00:11:03,200--> 00:11:05,388

And let's explore that.

247

00:11:05,412--> 00:11:08,200

So... All fine.

248

00:11:08,200--> 00:11:10,468

You know, it took me
another... more than 20 years

249

00:11:10,492--> 00:11:12,200

to turn this course into a book.

250

00:11:12,200--> 00:11:14,028

And I...

251

00:11:14,052--> 00:11:17,200

In some ways, this is an
embarrassed confession,

252

00:11:17,200--> 00:11:20,948

because, you know, I

went back and I went to

253

00:11:20,972--> 00:11:23,148

fill in all those bits

254

00:11:23,172--> 00:11:25,668

that I've been slightly

sheepish about

255

00:11:25,692--> 00:11:27,308

not having filled in before.

256

00:11:27,332--> 00:11:30,200

You know, I... you know,

I could not claim that

257

00:11:30,200--> 00:11:32,188

I'm a great expert in Roman law,

258

00:11:32,212--> 00:11:34,200

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but I knew that I
had to do more.

259

00:11:34,200--> 00:11:38,228

So, I took... it took
me 4 or 5 years

260

00:11:38,252--> 00:11:41,200

pretty consistently,
a bit on and off,

261

00:11:41,200--> 00:11:43,588

to read all the things

262

00:11:43,612--> 00:11:47,200

that I'd slightly disguised
my ignorance of.

263

00:11:47,200--> 00:11:49,348

Um, and I...

264

00:11:49,372--> 00:11:52,200

I suppose I'd thought that

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265

00:11:52,200--> 00:11:54,588

what I would then write
would be very different

266

00:11:54,612--> 00:11:56,200

from the courses it
was given, how I'd...

267

00:11:56,200--> 00:11:58,508

originally thought it.

268

00:11:58,532--> 00:12:02,228

And it felt very different
when I was doing it.

269

00:12:02,252--> 00:12:05,200

It felt that I was on a new
project and it had been

270

00:12:05,200--> 00:12:07,508

reinvigorated, um,

271

00:12:07,532--> 00:12:11,548

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by having explored all
kinds of different areas

272

00:12:11,572--> 00:12:15,200

and having grown up, you
know, in the intervening 25 years.

273

00:12:15,200--> 00:12:17,308

I suppose what surprised me

274

00:12:17,332--> 00:12:19,200

when I kind of
finally read through

275

00:12:19,200--> 00:12:20,988

the finished articles,

276

00:12:21,012--> 00:12:24,200

I thought this is the
course, really, in the end.

277

00:12:24,200--> 00:12:25,948

It's changed in bits,

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278

00:12:25,972--> 00:12:28,308

but what I wanted to say then

279

00:12:28,332--> 00:12:31,200

about how you

understand an emperor,

280

00:12:31,200--> 00:12:33,028

that's still what I'm saying.

281

00:12:33,052--> 00:12:35,948

Now, I'm either

embarrassed about that

282

00:12:35,972--> 00:12:37,668

and I feel slightly

embarrassed. Don't...

283

00:12:37,692--> 00:12:39,400

Can't you ever change

your mind, you know?

284

00:12:39,424--> 00:12:43,468

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But, uh, I'm also, with
the other hand, feeling...

285

00:12:43,492--> 00:12:47,268

Well, maybe I am saying what
I've wanted to say for a long time

286

00:12:47,292--> 00:12:48,828

and it is basically the same,

287

00:12:48,852--> 00:12:51,200

and this is the
fruit of it, and...

288

00:12:51,200--> 00:12:54,200

Now I'm gonna let it go
and do something else.

289

00:12:54,200--> 00:12:58,108

I think it's really lovely that
you've touched on the duality

290

00:12:58,132--> 00:12:59,508

between fact and fiction,

291

00:12:59,532--> 00:13:01,300

because this is
something that I wanted to,

292

00:13:01,324--> 00:13:03,428

um, to learn more on.

293

00:13:03,452--> 00:13:05,388

As a contract
advisor, quite often,

294

00:13:05,412--> 00:13:07,348

we've been known to
advise on disclaimers

295

00:13:07,372--> 00:13:09,748

that go in the title verso
pages about, you know,

296

00:13:09,772--> 00:13:12,908

X is true, the rest is...
the rest is fictionalized

297

00:13:12,932--> 00:13:15,200

or this has been fictionalized
for dramatic purpose.

298

00:13:15,200--> 00:13:18,148

And what really struck me
reading Emperor of Rome is,

299

00:13:18,172--> 00:13:21,308

you know, you talk about, well,
the possibility this is lurid fantasy

300

00:13:21,332--> 00:13:23,628

or the... You know, the, um...

301

00:13:23,652--> 00:13:27,200

You know, this could be, um,
urban myth, I think is another term.

302

00:13:27,200--> 00:13:30,108

And it just works so well that
you're all weaving together those...

303

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00:13:30,132--> 00:13:31,588

the fact and fiction.

304

00:13:31,612--> 00:13:34,200

I just wondered, is that

actually part of the great appeal

305

00:13:34,200--> 00:13:37,668

as a writer, but

also as an academic

306

00:13:37,692--> 00:13:41,200

in the material of

ancient Roman Empire?

307

00:13:41,200--> 00:13:42,200

The fact that you--

308

00:13:42,200--> 00:13:44,908

-Yeah, I mean... Yes, I think...

309

00:13:44,932--> 00:13:46,468

I've come to see that.

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310

00:13:46,492--> 00:13:49,148

You know, if you
took me back 40 years,

311

00:13:49,172--> 00:13:51,228

I wouldn't be saying
that, you know?

312

00:13:51,252--> 00:13:54,628

I'd be much more
[inaudible] and concerned

313

00:13:54,652--> 00:13:56,200

to filter out all the rubbish.

314

00:13:56,200--> 00:13:58,788

Um...

315

00:13:58,812--> 00:14:02,200

The kind of history I
think I've come to do

316

00:14:02,200--> 00:14:03,828

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is one that says

317

00:14:03,852--> 00:14:07,908

what people talk about

is important, you know.

318

00:14:07,932--> 00:14:09,948

There is a history in our lives,

319

00:14:09,972--> 00:14:11,400

there's a history

in our untruths.

320

00:14:11,424--> 00:14:17,308

Uh, to have only the truth

about somewhere, not all

321

00:14:17,332--> 00:14:21,308

the rubbish, the

exaggeration, um, the...

322

00:14:21,332--> 00:14:24,200

the mad stories they

invented themselves

323

00:14:24,200--> 00:14:26,268

would be

324

00:14:26,292--> 00:14:28,828

such a narrow form of history.

325

00:14:28,852--> 00:14:31,588

I mean... I hope I'm not
going to offend anybody now,

326

00:14:31,612--> 00:14:34,048

because I can't see how many
Daily Mail journalists there are

327

00:14:34,072--> 00:14:36,228

in the, uh, in the
audience here,

328

00:14:36,252--> 00:14:39,348

but, you know, if we had a
history of the 21st century,

329

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00:14:39,372--> 00:14:40,828

so far as it's got,

330

00:14:40,852--> 00:14:44,228

without thinking about

what was in the Daily Mail,

331

00:14:44,252--> 00:14:46,200

it would be an

impoverished history.

332

00:14:46,200--> 00:14:49,428

And whether we like it or not,

333

00:14:49,452--> 00:14:53,200

those kind of ways of how

we think about ourselves

334

00:14:53,200--> 00:14:54,628

are so important.

335

00:14:54,652--> 00:14:56,348

They're often not true,

336

00:14:56,372--> 00:14:57,668

in one sense,

337

00:14:57,692--> 00:15:00,200

but they're really important, and so...

338

00:15:00,200--> 00:15:03,188

it was... it was really exciting.

339

00:15:03,212--> 00:15:05,200

Now, this did go

back to the course

340

00:15:05,200--> 00:15:07,388

to be able to say

look, everybody,

341

00:15:07,412--> 00:15:13,200

we need to think about all

the fibs they told themselves

342

00:15:13,200--> 00:15:16,108

as well as the truth

that underlay them.

343

00:15:16,132--> 00:15:18,028

And, uh, so I...

344

00:15:18,052--> 00:15:20,628

You know, I think

that fiction and fact is...

345

00:15:20,652--> 00:15:24,268

You know, it's a cliché, I

suppose, to say it's inseparable

346

00:15:24,292--> 00:15:26,988

and in some ways, I

should have learned that

347

00:15:27,012--> 00:15:30,148

from ancient Roman

history writers themselves.

348

00:15:30,172--> 00:15:31,200

You know, Tacitus

349

00:15:31,200--> 00:15:36,708

will come on and he will
give you the exact words

350

00:15:36,732--> 00:15:38,868

of the emperor
speaking to someone

351

00:15:38,892--> 00:15:41,200

in a private meeting
which he knew nothing of,

352

00:15:41,200--> 00:15:42,428

right?

353

00:15:42,452--> 00:15:45,508

Because it's what you think
the Roman Emperor said,

354

00:15:45,532--> 00:15:47,200

what he might have said,

355

00:15:47,200--> 00:15:49,828

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what we could imagine he said

356

00:15:49,852--> 00:15:54,200

that becomes the basis
of historical narrative, so...

357

00:15:54,200--> 00:15:58,028

So, yeah, I've, you
know, I've got over truth.

358

00:15:58,052--> 00:15:59,200

[laughs]

359

00:15:59,200--> 00:16:02,748

-And an extension, I suppose, is
that these stories have tremendous

360

00:16:02,772--> 00:16:04,200

cultural appeal through

361

00:16:04,200--> 00:16:07,468

other areas of culture,

362

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00:16:07,492--> 00:16:09,748

and you mentioned maybe
passing references, sort of,

363

00:16:09,772--> 00:16:12,668

Hollywood and, you know, if
you're aware of the movie image.

364

00:16:12,692--> 00:16:15,200

And I just wondered
if we could look at

365

00:16:15,200--> 00:16:17,788

maybe, um...

366

00:16:17,812--> 00:16:19,508

The issue of authenticity

367

00:16:19,532--> 00:16:22,188

and whether you think that
TV producers, radio producers

368

00:16:22,212--> 00:16:25,200

are, in a sense, doing enough

369

00:16:25,200--> 00:16:29,200

to make sure that whilst some of
their representations might be fictional,

370

00:16:29,200--> 00:16:31,628

but are they actually making...

371

00:16:31,652--> 00:16:35,200

are they doing enough to make
sure that they're actually authentic?

372

00:16:35,200--> 00:16:38,268

-I think it's now, and I
think it's very hard to know

373

00:16:38,292--> 00:16:41,108

what authentic is when you're
talking about 2,000 years ago.

374

00:16:41,132--> 00:16:42,200

And...

375

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00:16:42,200--> 00:16:47,200

In many ways, and I suppose

I'm always trying to fight this,

376

00:16:47,200--> 00:16:50,068

in many ways, uh...

377

00:16:50,092--> 00:16:53,200

I think the job of the historian

378

00:16:53,200--> 00:16:58,028

is both to enjoy the fictional

representation, right?

379

00:16:58,052--> 00:16:59,188

And, you know, I...

380

00:16:59,212--> 00:17:02,148

You know, it was the

BBC television series

381

00:17:02,172--> 00:17:03,200

of I, Claudius that...

382

00:17:03,200--> 00:17:08,428

That actually fixed the early
Roman emperors in my head.

383

00:17:08,452--> 00:17:10,588

Not, I have to say, the
Robert Graves novel,

384

00:17:10,612--> 00:17:13,200

which I didn't enjoy as
much as I enjoyed the telly,

385

00:17:13,200--> 00:17:15,348

am, and so there is something...

386

00:17:15,372--> 00:17:18,788

We need to think
about how we can

387

00:17:18,812--> 00:17:21,200

reimagine and
imagine these people.

388

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00:17:21,200--> 00:17:24,988

But I think that the
other side of that

389

00:17:25,012--> 00:17:28,200

is to say

390

00:17:28,200--> 00:17:32,028

how can we possibly
stop projecting ourselves

391

00:17:32,052--> 00:17:33,988

onto the past, you know?

392

00:17:34,012--> 00:17:35,668

Now, maybe we can't,

393

00:17:35,692--> 00:17:37,948

but we might at least realize
that's what we're doing.

394

00:17:37,972--> 00:17:39,200

You know, and there's some

395

00:17:39,200--> 00:17:40,548

terribly basic points.

396

00:17:40,572--> 00:17:45,200

I mean, how does a
post-Freudian writer

397

00:17:45,200--> 00:17:47,508

write about
pre-Freudian individuals

398

00:17:47,532--> 00:17:49,148

and how they thought
about themselves?

399

00:17:49,172--> 00:17:53,748

And, you know, I said
I really loved I, Claudius,

400

00:17:53,772--> 00:17:54,948

like, you know, I...

401

00:17:54,972--> 00:17:57,908

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Livia will always be Siân
Phillips for me, you know.

402

00:17:57,932--> 00:18:02,200

I will never get rid of
her, I'm pleased to say.

403

00:18:02,200--> 00:18:06,388

But, you know, there you had
all our clichés about us, you know.

404

00:18:06,412--> 00:18:09,108

There's Claudius,
he's a bit of a dodger,

405

00:18:09,132--> 00:18:11,348

but he's an academic
and he's a decent guy.

406

00:18:11,372--> 00:18:15,188

I mean Claudius, uh, the
real Emperor Claudius,

407

00:18:15,212--> 00:18:17,668

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I think might be quite
pleased that he got off so lightly

408

00:18:17,692--> 00:18:19,188

in that image.

409

00:18:19,212--> 00:18:22,200

But he would... there's no way
they would recognize themselves.

410

00:18:22,200--> 00:18:25,268

Now, so the challenge
for the historian, I think,

411

00:18:25,292--> 00:18:27,148

is to say, how do
you deal with that?

412

00:18:27,172--> 00:18:28,200

How do you deal with the

413

00:18:28,200--> 00:18:30,228

absolute necessity

414

00:18:30,252--> 00:18:31,908

that we do reinvent them?

415

00:18:31,932--> 00:18:34,200

We reinvent them with

the tools that we've got

416

00:18:34,200--> 00:18:38,588

versus the fact that we

know they're alien bastards,

417

00:18:38,612--> 00:18:41,148

which is what they are.

418

00:18:42,200--> 00:18:44,668

-Are you and Emperor of

Rome sharing that whilst

419

00:18:44,692--> 00:18:47,228

we should not perhaps look

to the ancient Roman Empire

420

00:18:47,252--> 00:18:50,200

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for solutions to
today's problems, but

421

00:18:50,200--> 00:18:54,028

perhaps appreciate that an understanding,
an interest in those cultures

422

00:18:54,052--> 00:18:56,428

can help us see politics
and society of today

423

00:18:56,452--> 00:18:59,200

in a more, perhaps,
nuanced light.

424

00:18:59,200--> 00:19:01,148

Like, have I accurately
summarized that?

425

00:19:01,172--> 00:19:03,588

Would you suggest would
that be a fair summation?

426

00:19:03,612--> 00:19:06,548

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-Yeah. Yes. Yes,

I mean.... I wrote...

427

00:19:06,572--> 00:19:09,200

When I got to the end
of Emperor of Rome,

428

00:19:09,200--> 00:19:12,588

publishers on both
sides of the Atlantic said

429

00:19:12,612--> 00:19:14,988

"so what's the lesson, you know?

430

00:19:15,012--> 00:19:17,200

What's the lesson for now?

431

00:19:17,200--> 00:19:21,148

You've written, you know, 450
pages on Roman emperors. Why?

432

00:19:21,172--> 00:19:23,200

You know, what do
we learn from this?"

433

00:19:23,200--> 00:19:26,388

And my first reaction was
terribly sort of academic.

434

00:19:26,412--> 00:19:29,508

And to say, "well, I don't think
you do learn from the Romans."

435

00:19:29,532--> 00:19:33,908

And I partly do think that. I think
that in terms of direct lessons,

436

00:19:33,932--> 00:19:36,200

the Romans haven't
got them for us.

437

00:19:36,200--> 00:19:40,628

But I... being made
to think about it

438

00:19:40,652--> 00:19:44,200

and them saying, "look, we want
something at the end, about now",

439

00:19:44,200--> 00:19:48,948

I thought there are
structural lessons here,

440

00:19:48,972--> 00:19:51,068

really important
structural lessons,

441

00:19:51,092--> 00:19:53,200

about how one man
rule works, and...

442

00:19:53,200--> 00:19:55,708

You know, I think it's
kind of relevant for now.

443

00:19:55,732--> 00:19:58,200

And I thought...

444

00:19:58,200--> 00:20:00,828

what do most people
think about how

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445

00:20:00,852--> 00:20:05,200

the Roman emperor

survives, works,

446

00:20:05,200--> 00:20:07,388

establishes his rule?

447

00:20:07,412--> 00:20:10,588

And they think of it as

kind of bloodstone corridors

448

00:20:10,612--> 00:20:11,908

of power kind of stuff.

449

00:20:11,932--> 00:20:13,668

And there's partly

that, you know.

450

00:20:13,692--> 00:20:18,868

Um, there's not many corridors in Rome

that aren't bloodstained, to be honest.

451

00:20:18,892--> 00:20:23,200

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Um, but that isn't why...

452

00:20:23,200--> 00:20:26,308

That is not the main
reason that Roman emperors

453

00:20:26,332--> 00:20:27,988

survived on the throne.

454

00:20:28,012--> 00:20:29,668

Why one-man rule survived.

455

00:20:29,692--> 00:20:33,200

The main reason is that
everybody went along with it.

456

00:20:33,200--> 00:20:36,988

You know? Almost
everybody was a collaborator.

457

00:20:37,012--> 00:20:40,200

They might, when the
particular emperor was dead,

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458

00:20:40,200--> 00:20:42,828

say how they hated him.

459

00:20:42,852--> 00:20:47,200

They might go home in the
evening and say [exhales]

460

00:20:47,200--> 00:20:50,788

"you know, this guy's really
awful, I'm not sure I can stand them.

461

00:20:50,812--> 00:20:52,588

You know, I can't
stand this much longer."

462

00:20:52,612--> 00:20:55,308

But they went into
the palace the next day

463

00:20:55,332--> 00:20:57,200

and they did the business.

464

00:20:57,200--> 00:21:00,308

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And I thought, you know,
that's obvious, isn't it?

465

00:21:00,332--> 00:21:01,388

That's how...

466

00:21:01,412--> 00:21:03,268

That's how dictatorships
always survive,

467

00:21:03,292--> 00:21:06,200

because most of us collaborate.

468

00:21:06,200--> 00:21:10,200

Alright? I remember once asking a
group of students on a different course

469

00:21:10,200--> 00:21:11,828

what...

470

00:21:11,852--> 00:21:16,200

Thinking about how classics had
operated in the mid-20th century

471

00:21:16,200--> 00:21:19,308

and we've been

talking about the careers

472

00:21:19,332--> 00:21:23,200

of one or two famous classicists

over the Second World War,

473

00:21:23,200--> 00:21:26,788

and I remember we

said to the students,

474

00:21:26,812--> 00:21:29,200

"what would you have

done? If you'd been in France

475

00:21:29,200--> 00:21:32,908

classics in France during the Second

World War, what would you have done?"

476

00:21:32,932--> 00:21:34,548

Um, they all put their

hands up and said,

477

00:21:34,572--> 00:21:36,228

"I'd have joined
the resistance."

478

00:21:36,252--> 00:21:39,148

And I thought we
like to think that.

479

00:21:39,172--> 00:21:40,172

[laughs]

480

00:21:40,196--> 00:21:42,200

One of you might.

481

00:21:42,200--> 00:21:45,548

But most people collaborate,

482

00:21:45,572--> 00:21:48,588

and autocracy is
supported by collaboration

483

00:21:48,612--> 00:21:51,291

and we're seeing that

all over the world now.

484

00:21:52,200--> 00:21:54,668

-And just to, um...

485

00:21:54,692--> 00:21:56,468

Yeah, to segue...

486

00:21:56,492--> 00:22:00,200

Well, to just chat further

about collaboration, um...

487

00:22:00,200--> 00:22:02,068

Again, I noticed in

your acknowledgements

488

00:22:02,092--> 00:22:04,988

that you were, um, recognizing

489

00:22:05,012--> 00:22:07,068

the input of colleagues,

friends, etcetera.

490

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00:22:07,092--> 00:22:08,788

I wondered what,

491

00:22:08,812--> 00:22:12,068

taking it down to a more
sort of creative, practical level,

492

00:22:12,092--> 00:22:14,588

what that act of collaboration
looked like for you

493

00:22:14,612--> 00:22:16,188

in terms of writing this book,

494

00:22:16,212--> 00:22:19,200

how that worked.

495

00:22:19,200--> 00:22:23,028

There's a lot of, um, obviously
in research and academia,

496

00:22:23,052--> 00:22:24,828

there's a whole process
for sharing research

497

00:22:24,852--> 00:22:26,200

and commenting on research.

498

00:22:26,200--> 00:22:28,668

Um, I just wondered how that...

499

00:22:28,692--> 00:22:30,200

What that looked like?

500

00:22:30,200--> 00:22:33,668

I think it goes kind of deep,

501

00:22:33,692--> 00:22:35,200

as well as immediate.

502

00:22:35,200--> 00:22:37,908

And, you know, if you say...

503

00:22:37,932--> 00:22:41,200

If I think back over my career,

504

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00:22:41,200--> 00:22:45,068

what kind of collaborative input

505

00:22:45,092--> 00:22:48,200

has been most important

506

00:22:48,200--> 00:22:50,108

over decades, actually,

507

00:22:50,132--> 00:22:52,588

um, the example I'd go back to,

508

00:22:52,612--> 00:22:55,200

and it's... I'll come to the more
immediate examples in a minute,

509

00:22:55,200--> 00:22:58,268

um, is...

510

00:22:58,292--> 00:23:01,200

When I was quite a
young academic, and I

511

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00:23:01,200--> 00:23:04,868

had written one of my
early articles in draft,

512

00:23:04,892--> 00:23:09,200

and I went out with a senior
colleague to have lunch

513

00:23:09,200--> 00:23:11,788

and I'd given him
the article to read.

514

00:23:11,812--> 00:23:14,200

And I'd said to him

515

00:23:14,200--> 00:23:17,148

"I want you to see what
you really think, you know.

516

00:23:17,172--> 00:23:20,148

I want you to be as
frank as you want to be."

517

00:23:20,172--> 00:23:22,468

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Now, when people say
that, they don't really mean it.

518

00:23:22,492--> 00:23:24,900

What they mean is, I'd like
you to say how brilliant it is.

519

00:23:24,924--> 00:23:28,228

Um, but you always have to go through,
"I want you to say what you think."

520

00:23:28,252--> 00:23:32,200

And, you know, I'm afraid we
got on to the second bottle of wine

521

00:23:32,200--> 00:23:35,108

when he nerved himself,
and I can see now how...

522

00:23:35,132--> 00:23:36,500

what a nerve it
must be. He said,

523

00:23:36,524--> 00:23:39,628

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"Mary, I think what you
write is probably correct,

524

00:23:39,652--> 00:23:43,200

but I think it's very boring."

525

00:23:43,200--> 00:23:46,628

And... does anybody ever, like...

526

00:23:46,652--> 00:23:48,700

I mean, that's almost the
worst insult in the world.

527

00:23:48,724--> 00:23:50,200

-Devastating, yeah.

528

00:23:50,200--> 00:23:53,348

-You've written something
which is true but dull, you know?

529

00:23:53,372--> 00:23:56,188

And...

530

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00:23:56,212--> 00:23:59,200

So I went away with
my tail between my legs.

531

00:23:59,200--> 00:24:02,028

I've never stopped hearing
him say that, though.

532

00:24:02,052--> 00:24:04,948

So, you know, for 40 years,

533

00:24:04,972--> 00:24:07,200

when I'm writing something,

534

00:24:07,200--> 00:24:11,200

I keep thinking what Keith
said, and I thought, is this boring?

535

00:24:11,200--> 00:24:14,708

And so, partly, I've got
the collaborator in my head

536

00:24:14,732--> 00:24:18,200

saying, "look at

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that again, is it dull?"

537

00:24:18,200--> 00:24:20,268

So, that's been...

538

00:24:20,292--> 00:24:24,200

That's been my kind of
lifelong mental collaboration.

539

00:24:24,200--> 00:24:27,708

I get a huge amount
out of colleagues

540

00:24:27,732--> 00:24:29,200

and ex-colleagues and readers.

541

00:24:29,200--> 00:24:32,148

But it's... you're aware that you...

542

00:24:32,172--> 00:24:35,508

You can't exploit your
colleagues, you know,

543

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00:24:35,532--> 00:24:38,228

to say... I mean, I'm
a very slow reader

544

00:24:38,252--> 00:24:40,308

and if somebody says
to me, um, you know,

545

00:24:40,332--> 00:24:43,200

I've got a 500-page manuscript,
could you just look it over?

546

00:24:43,200--> 00:24:48,200

You know, I think, looking over,
you know, if I read this properly

547

00:24:48,200--> 00:24:51,268

that is, for me, over a
week's solid work, right?

548

00:24:51,292--> 00:24:57,200

And so I'm very, very
conscious of trying to

549

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00:24:57,200--> 00:25:00,828

a sort of husband, if you...

550

00:25:00,852--> 00:25:03,428

If that expression's

okay. "Husband",

551

00:25:03,452--> 00:25:05,988

um, my friends, and

552

00:25:06,012--> 00:25:08,200

give them different bits.

553

00:25:08,200--> 00:25:11,668

It's like, could you

help me on this chapter?

554

00:25:11,692--> 00:25:14,200

I mean, I've got one very

good friend who does,

555

00:25:14,200--> 00:25:18,148

bless him, um,

read the whole lot

556

00:25:18,172--> 00:25:19,788

and he's got a
journalist background,

557

00:25:19,812--> 00:25:23,200

and he's also himself good
at stopping me being boring.

558

00:25:23,200--> 00:25:25,868

Um, but otherwise, you know,

559

00:25:25,892--> 00:25:27,948

I try not to take my
friends for granted

560

00:25:27,972--> 00:25:29,908

or I try to say,
I've got 3 things

561

00:25:29,932--> 00:25:31,200

I want to talk to you about.

562

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00:25:31,200--> 00:25:33,548

Because, you know,
by the time you get,

563

00:25:33,572--> 00:25:35,828

you know, to be
something like my age,

564

00:25:35,852--> 00:25:40,200

you know, every day
brings requests to read stuff.

565

00:25:40,200--> 00:25:41,908

And you know
that they can't do it.

566

00:25:41,932--> 00:25:43,300

And then I think,
well, I think

567

00:25:43,324--> 00:25:46,788

I complain a bit when yet
another manuscript arrives.

568

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00:25:46,812--> 00:25:49,200

I can't then go and
say, "please read mine."

569

00:25:49,200--> 00:25:51,748

So, I think we have to...

570

00:25:51,772--> 00:25:54,200

Uh, be quite careful about

571

00:25:54,200--> 00:25:57,908

how we hear our friends
and colleagues' voices,

572

00:25:57,932--> 00:26:01,200

that we do ask them.
I think any, you know...

573

00:26:01,200--> 00:26:04,228

There'll be examples
to the contrary here,

574

00:26:04,252--> 00:26:06,028

but I feel any book that I wrote

575

00:26:06,052--> 00:26:08,228

that hadn't been
shown around a bit

576

00:26:08,252--> 00:26:10,200

would be worse than if I...

577

00:26:10,200--> 00:26:13,028

Um, than if I do show it around.

578

00:26:13,052--> 00:26:15,628

But I always feel a bit...

I do feel a bit difficult

579

00:26:15,652--> 00:26:19,200

and um... and then, of course,
sometimes you don't want to

580

00:26:19,200--> 00:26:21,308

do what the person says.

581

00:26:21,332--> 00:26:24,200

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But, you know,
normally, I think,

582

00:26:24,200--> 00:26:26,548

when a... You know, in a chapter

583

00:26:26,572--> 00:26:30,200

that you've given someone
comes back covered in scrawl,

584

00:26:30,200--> 00:26:33,228

you may not agree
with what they think

585

00:26:33,252--> 00:26:37,868

but if they felt that they
needed to scrawl over it,

586

00:26:37,892--> 00:26:40,200

there's probably
something the matter.

587

00:26:40,200--> 00:26:43,028

They might not have

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diagnosed the problem.

588

00:26:43,052--> 00:26:45,268

And you might be better
at diagnosing the problem,

589

00:26:45,292--> 00:26:48,200

but they've seen
that there is one.

590

00:26:48,200--> 00:26:51,268

-Thank you, Mary, that
was absolutely fascinating,

591

00:26:51,292--> 00:26:53,348

um, and you've been so
generous with your insights.

592

00:26:53,372--> 00:26:54,548

And I've wondered,

593

00:26:54,572--> 00:26:56,728

given that we've talked so
much about Emperor of Rome,

594

00:26:56,752--> 00:27:00,200

I just wondered whether I might,
as we edge closer to 3 o'clock,

595

00:27:00,200--> 00:27:04,508

invite you to share with us a
short extract, um, from the book.

596

00:27:04,532--> 00:27:05,532

Okay.

597

00:27:05,556--> 00:27:07,688

-Um, and I should say, for
those wishing to hear more,

598

00:27:07,712--> 00:27:09,068

and of course you all will,

599

00:27:09,092--> 00:27:13,200

I assure you the audiobook
narrated by Mary is available, um,

600

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00:27:13,200--> 00:27:15,388

wherever you get
your audiobooks.

601

00:27:15,412--> 00:27:18,468

And for now, though,
do enjoy this exclusive.

602

00:27:18,492--> 00:27:20,548

Uh, Mary, over
to you, if you will.

603

00:27:20,572--> 00:27:22,748

-This is from the beginning.

604

00:27:22,772--> 00:27:25,200

Elagabalus was
a Syrian teenager.

605

00:27:25,200--> 00:27:28,348

He was Emperor of
Rome from 218 CE

606

00:27:28,372--> 00:27:31,200

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until his assassination in 222

607

00:27:31,200--> 00:27:35,388

and a memorably
extravagant, inventive,

608

00:27:35,412--> 00:27:38,200

and occasionally
sadistic party host.

609

00:27:38,200--> 00:27:42,188

His menus, so ancient
writers tell, were ingenious.

610

00:27:42,212--> 00:27:43,908

On some occasions,

611

00:27:43,932--> 00:27:46,200

the food would be
colour-coded, all blue,

612

00:27:46,200--> 00:27:47,548

all green.

613

00:27:47,572--> 00:27:50,148

On others, it would

feature delicacies

614

00:27:50,172--> 00:27:52,668

that were exotic or revolting,

615

00:27:52,692--> 00:27:55,200

even by upmarket

Roman standards.

616

00:27:55,200--> 00:27:58,908

Camel's heels or

flamingos' brains

617

00:27:58,932--> 00:28:02,200

with foie gras served

to his pet dogs.

618

00:28:02,200--> 00:28:07,548

Sometimes, he indulged his

nasty or juvenile sense of humour

619

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00:28:07,572--> 00:28:10,200

by inviting themed

fellow diners.

620

00:28:10,200--> 00:28:12,908

Groups of eight bald men,

621

00:28:12,932--> 00:28:14,828

eight men with one eye

622

00:28:14,852--> 00:28:17,548

or with hernias, or

eight very fat men

623

00:28:17,572--> 00:28:19,200

who raised a cruel laugh

624

00:28:19,200--> 00:28:22,748

and they couldn't all fit

onto the same dining couch.

625

00:28:22,772--> 00:28:26,268

It's other party tricks

included whoopee cushions,

626

00:28:26,292--> 00:28:29,200

the first ever recorded
in Western culture

627

00:28:29,200--> 00:28:32,788

which gradually
deflated under the guests

628

00:28:32,812--> 00:28:34,708

so that they ended
up on the floor.

629

00:28:34,732--> 00:28:37,200

Fake food of wax or glass

630

00:28:37,200--> 00:28:40,268

served up to the least
important banqueters

631

00:28:40,292--> 00:28:42,308

who would be forced
to spend the evening

632

00:28:42,332--> 00:28:46,200

tummy's rumbling, watching
their betters eating the real thing.

633

00:28:46,200--> 00:28:49,308

And tame lions,
lepers, and bears

634

00:28:49,332--> 00:28:52,200

released among
the revellers as they

635

00:28:52,200--> 00:28:55,388

slept off the excesses
of the night before.

636

00:28:55,412--> 00:28:59,200

Very small concluding bit...

637

00:28:59,200--> 00:29:01,308

Ancient accounts of his reign

638

00:29:01,332--> 00:29:03,388

devote page after page

639

00:29:03,412--> 00:29:06,148

to extravagant listings

640

00:29:06,172--> 00:29:09,200

of the Emperor's

puzzling eccentricities,

641

00:29:09,200--> 00:29:11,828

his disconcerting subversions,

642

00:29:11,852--> 00:29:13,748

and heinous cruelties,

643

00:29:13,772--> 00:29:15,748

including, at the

top of some lists,

644

00:29:15,772--> 00:29:18,200

the human sacrifice of children.

645

00:29:18,200--> 00:29:20,668

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These, and other
tales like them,

646

00:29:20,692--> 00:29:23,148

are one focus of
Emperor of Rome.

647

00:29:23,172--> 00:29:24,200

Where do they come from?

648

00:29:24,200--> 00:29:26,188

How well known were they

649

00:29:26,212--> 00:29:29,200

to the ordinary inhabitants
of the Roman Empire?

650

00:29:29,200--> 00:29:32,548

Who muttered and why
about Elagabalus's parties?

651

00:29:32,572--> 00:29:35,200

And true or not,
what can those...

652

00:29:35,200--> 00:29:39,068

What can those tales tell
us about Roman emperors

653

00:29:39,092--> 00:29:41,988

or about Romans more generally?

654

00:29:44,200--> 00:29:45,388

-Bravo, thank you.

655

00:29:45,412--> 00:29:47,588

That was wonderful
and very, very special.

656

00:29:47,612--> 00:29:53,200

Um, and so now we open
the digital floor to questions

657

00:29:53,200--> 00:29:56,200

and we had a few in advance,
so if you wouldn't mind, I will just...

658

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00:29:56,200--> 00:29:57,748

start with those.

659

00:29:57,772--> 00:29:59,028

Um...

660

00:29:59,052--> 00:30:00,748

And we start with this.

661

00:30:00,772--> 00:30:03,748

"What do you think, Mary,
are the essential elements

662

00:30:03,772--> 00:30:06,788

in making non-fiction
writing appealing

663

00:30:06,812--> 00:30:09,200

to a wide audience?"

664

00:30:09,200--> 00:30:10,908

-I think it's

665

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00:30:10,932--> 00:30:13,588

about...

666

00:30:13,612--> 00:30:15,200

The basic thing

667

00:30:15,200--> 00:30:19,308

is thinking what you

want your audience

668

00:30:19,332--> 00:30:22,200

to see and read and hear,

669

00:30:22,200--> 00:30:25,148

rather than what you

want to say to them.

670

00:30:25,172--> 00:30:26,868

And I think that...

671

00:30:26,892--> 00:30:28,508

And that goes for...

672

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00:30:28,532--> 00:30:30,548

I learnt that, really,

673

00:30:30,572--> 00:30:33,308

in teaching

postgraduate students,

674

00:30:33,332--> 00:30:35,828

who are always very keen

to get their ideas across

675

00:30:35,852--> 00:30:37,628

in a seminar or an article.

676

00:30:37,652--> 00:30:39,200

I'm sure that was like me.

677

00:30:39,200--> 00:30:40,548

Instead of saying,

678

00:30:40,572--> 00:30:46,200

what do I want my

audience to hear me saying?

679

00:30:46,200--> 00:30:48,428

And so I think it's a
question of putting yourself

680

00:30:48,452--> 00:30:50,200

in the position of the reader,

681

00:30:50,200--> 00:30:52,788

um, not the writer.

682

00:30:53,200--> 00:30:54,988

-Brilliant advice.

683

00:30:55,012--> 00:30:57,428

Now, we touched on
authenticity in the context

684

00:30:57,452--> 00:31:00,200

of TV and film, and
we have this next up.

685

00:31:00,200--> 00:31:03,628

"Do you ever feel, when you're

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writing about Roman gladiators

686

00:31:03,652--> 00:31:06,068

or talking about them

on radio or television,

687

00:31:06,092--> 00:31:08,200

that it is all a little

bit gruesome?

688

00:31:08,200--> 00:31:09,708

You only have to watch Wimbledon

689

00:31:09,732--> 00:31:13,108

to see how adversarial and

partisan crowds of spectators are,

690

00:31:13,132--> 00:31:15,548

and the Romans didn't

have John McEnroe

691

00:31:15,572--> 00:31:19,668

urging them to hang cool,

except perhaps in another lifetime."

692

00:31:20,200--> 00:31:23,200

-I find Gladiator's one of the
most difficult things to write about,

693

00:31:23,200--> 00:31:25,948

um, because...

694

00:31:25,972--> 00:31:29,588

You shouldn't be able to
get away from the question

695

00:31:29,612--> 00:31:33,200

of how could they
possibly do that?

696

00:31:33,200--> 00:31:36,388

I mean, I think that
one of the most puzzling

697

00:31:36,412--> 00:31:38,388

of all questions
about Roman history

698

00:31:38,412--> 00:31:42,828

is what on earth do we

imagine went through the heads

699

00:31:42,852--> 00:31:45,348

of the people who

sat in the Colosseum

700

00:31:45,372--> 00:31:46,372

watching that happen.

701

00:31:46,396--> 00:31:48,628

I mean, everybody

gets hooked on the idea

702

00:31:48,652--> 00:31:50,788

of what caused the decline

of the Roman Empire.

703

00:31:50,812--> 00:31:53,200

I think that's easy

compared to with

704

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00:31:53,200--> 00:31:54,748

how on earth did...

705

00:31:54,772--> 00:31:57,200

What did they do to take in

706

00:31:57,200--> 00:31:59,548

Gladiatorial display?

707

00:31:59,572--> 00:32:02,388

And I don't think I've

answered that very well,

708

00:32:02,412--> 00:32:05,668

and I don't think many

people do answer it very well.

709

00:32:05,692--> 00:32:06,828

I mean, I think...

710

00:32:06,852--> 00:32:08,500

I mean, if you look

at what I've written,

711

00:32:08,524--> 00:32:11,788

and I'm slightly
embarrassed by it now,

712

00:32:11,812--> 00:32:14,200

um, you see that I will say

713

00:32:14,200--> 00:32:16,748

um, you know, maybe...

714

00:32:16,772--> 00:32:19,788

No, it really wasn't quite as
bloody as we think, you know,

715

00:32:19,812--> 00:32:22,468

and give a few examples
of how gladiators

716

00:32:22,492--> 00:32:23,748

were very expensive commodities

717

00:32:23,772--> 00:32:26,868

and they wouldn't get killed

all that often, and the emperor...

718

00:32:26,892--> 00:32:28,300

even the emperor

couldn't afford it.

719

00:32:28,324--> 00:32:31,268

And I think, well, that's true.

720

00:32:31,292--> 00:32:34,200

I mean, I don't think

it... I think gladiators...

721

00:32:34,200--> 00:32:37,388

The gladiators existed

in the Roman imagination

722

00:32:37,412--> 00:32:38,668

as much as they did,

723

00:32:38,692--> 00:32:41,908

um, in the Colosseum

or other amphitheatres.

724

00:32:41,932--> 00:32:45,308

But I still think, you know,
there's a kind of sense of you say,

725

00:32:45,332--> 00:32:47,628

oh, well, yeah, we've
got to recognize this,

726

00:32:47,652--> 00:32:49,588

we've got to let the
Romans off the hook a bit,

727

00:32:49,612--> 00:32:52,200

and then just get down and
talk about the blood and the guts.

728

00:32:52,200--> 00:32:54,988

And, you know,
it's a place where...

729

00:32:55,012--> 00:32:58,548

You know, that fundamental
question of ancient history,

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730

00:32:58,572--> 00:33:00,200

or any sort of history, really,

731

00:33:00,200--> 00:33:04,268

comes up to kind of

beat you, which is...

732

00:33:04,292--> 00:33:06,508

Who's...

733

00:33:06,532--> 00:33:08,388

am I judging this

by my standards?

734

00:33:08,412--> 00:33:09,668

Because how could I not?

735

00:33:09,692--> 00:33:11,508

How could I... how

could I sit here and say,

736

00:33:11,532--> 00:33:13,200

oh, it's fine, because

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it's the Romans?

737

00:33:13,200--> 00:33:15,628

Um, uh...

738

00:33:15,652--> 00:33:18,200

You know, am I

supposed to deplore?

739

00:33:18,200--> 00:33:21,108

Or am I supposed to

let them off the hook,

740

00:33:21,132--> 00:33:24,200

you know, on the grounds

that they're 2,000 years ago?

741

00:33:24,200--> 00:33:27,188

And nobody's ever

answered that question

742

00:33:27,212--> 00:33:29,908

accurate-- Successfully.

743

00:33:31,200--> 00:33:33,188

-Um, now our question...

744

00:33:33,212--> 00:33:34,828

Our next question

comes from someone who

745

00:33:34,852--> 00:33:36,908

has watched all of your programs

746

00:33:36,932--> 00:33:38,588

and absolutely

loves your footwear,

747

00:33:38,612--> 00:33:41,708

and she asks, "where do you

get your shoes or trainers?

748

00:33:41,732--> 00:33:43,228

And I know this sounds trivial,

749

00:33:43,252--> 00:33:45,428

but as a fellow

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woman of a certain age

750

00:33:45,452--> 00:33:47,108

with, in my case, poor balance,

751

00:33:47,132--> 00:33:49,628

it's something that interests me

when you're scrambling around

752

00:33:49,652--> 00:33:51,200

on difficult terrain."

753

00:33:51,200--> 00:33:53,748

-That's a really good

question, because... [laughs]

754

00:33:53,772--> 00:33:55,200

Because, um...

755

00:33:55,200--> 00:33:57,908

At a certain point in my life,

756

00:33:57,932--> 00:34:00,188

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I think, just before I
started to do telly, actually,

757

00:34:00,212--> 00:34:02,200

when I was about 50,

758

00:34:02,200--> 00:34:05,068

I kind of realized that. um,

759

00:34:05,092--> 00:34:09,200

there wasn't much point in me
spending a lot of money on clothes,

760

00:34:09,200--> 00:34:11,108

you know, because as
soon as I put them on,

761

00:34:11,132--> 00:34:12,200

they, you know...

762

00:34:12,200--> 00:34:15,200

They didn't look like they
looked on the hangar, you know.

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763

00:34:15,200--> 00:34:17,948

And... but I did...

764

00:34:17,972--> 00:34:20,508

I came to realize

765

00:34:20,532--> 00:34:23,200

that a, shoes are ageless

766

00:34:23,200--> 00:34:25,748

and the expensive trainers

767

00:34:25,772--> 00:34:28,708

really are a hell of a lot

better than cheap trainers.

768

00:34:28,732--> 00:34:31,200

And even if, as I now am 70,

769

00:34:31,200--> 00:34:34,108

you've got some

really great trainers on,

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770

00:34:34,132--> 00:34:36,108

you become ageless.

771

00:34:36,132--> 00:34:38,200

And you've also...

772

00:34:38,200--> 00:34:40,628

You've got a kind of

773

00:34:40,652--> 00:34:42,748

sense in which

you're saying to people

774

00:34:42,772--> 00:34:45,200

who you meet in the street,

look, look at my shoes.

775

00:34:45,200--> 00:34:47,188

They're really good, right?

776

00:34:47,212--> 00:34:48,668

I mean, I've just

been in America

777

00:34:48,692--> 00:34:50,748

and I've been
wearing these trainers,

778

00:34:50,772--> 00:34:54,200

and you could always guarantee
that if you get in an elevator,

779

00:34:54,200--> 00:34:56,708

people say, "oh,
lovely sneakers!"

780

00:34:56,732--> 00:35:01,068

And so it's a sense of
confidence that it gives you,

781

00:35:01,092--> 00:35:03,508

and also confidence that
you're not going to trip over,

782

00:35:03,532--> 00:35:06,908

but I've never ever been able to
wear high heels without tripping over.

783

00:35:06,932--> 00:35:11,200

So, um, I've always
recognised my limitations there.

784

00:35:11,200--> 00:35:13,748

Um, but it is a...
it is a question of

785

00:35:13,772--> 00:35:16,200

being able to say....

786

00:35:16,200--> 00:35:19,348

Uh, I'm... I'm not afraid.

787

00:35:19,372--> 00:35:21,200

I'm not afraid to be bright.

788

00:35:21,200--> 00:35:25,200

Um, you know, but I'm not going
to be mutton dressed up as lamb

789

00:35:25,200--> 00:35:27,588

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and shoes are ageless,

790

00:35:27,612--> 00:35:32,200

and I think you can tell I've got
a daughter who's, um, nearly 40.

791

00:35:32,200--> 00:35:35,508

Uh, if we go out clothes
shopping for dresses together,

792

00:35:35,532--> 00:35:37,388

it is a disaster, right?

793

00:35:37,412--> 00:35:38,412

You know...

794

00:35:38,436--> 00:35:41,668

If we go out shoe shopping,
we like the same things.

795

00:35:41,692--> 00:35:43,348

So I think there's a kind of...

796

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00:35:43,372--> 00:35:45,708

There's a democratization
in footwear,

797

00:35:45,732--> 00:35:47,268

though I do think...

798

00:35:47,292--> 00:35:50,108

I decided when
you see me on telly,

799

00:35:50,132--> 00:35:53,428

the shoes probably cost as
much as the rest of the outfit.

800

00:35:54,200--> 00:35:57,308

-Such a heart-warming
insight there, thank you.

801

00:35:57,332--> 00:36:00,200

Dave and Paul have
questions around research.

802

00:36:00,200--> 00:36:05,228

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And, uh, essentially has the way
research has become available,

803

00:36:05,252--> 00:36:08,468

i.e. online, rather
than in libraries

804

00:36:08,492--> 00:36:10,200

in the print edition

805

00:36:10,200--> 00:36:13,548

change the way that you
conduct your research process?

806

00:36:13,572--> 00:36:16,200

And do you complete your
research before you write?

807

00:36:16,200--> 00:36:19,268

And I suppose one of the
things we really didn't talk about

808

00:36:19,292--> 00:36:21,628

is how many stages of drafts

809

00:36:21,652--> 00:36:22,868

does your book go through

810

00:36:22,892--> 00:36:24,200

before it becomes the book that

811

00:36:24,200--> 00:36:26,200

readers can buy on the shelves.

812

00:36:26,200--> 00:36:30,548

-Um, my research has
changed dramatically,

813

00:36:30,572--> 00:36:32,200

and...

814

00:36:32,200--> 00:36:34,508

I mean, I used to be

815

00:36:34,532--> 00:36:37,828

a university library girl
and I would go to the library.

816

00:36:37,852--> 00:36:38,988

That's where I did my work.

817

00:36:39,012--> 00:36:41,500

I went to the library, I got
the periodicals off the shelf,

818

00:36:41,524--> 00:36:45,200

I sat down, and I read them,
and I make notes, and all the rest.

819

00:36:45,200--> 00:36:48,908

You will probably be horrified

820

00:36:48,932--> 00:36:50,788

to know that in the UK,

821

00:36:50,812--> 00:36:52,468

it was different in
the United States,

822

00:36:52,492--> 00:36:55,428

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but in the UK, I haven't
actually gone and worked

823

00:36:55,452--> 00:36:57,200

for a day in the library,

824

00:36:57,200--> 00:36:58,988

possibly since COVID?

825

00:36:59,012--> 00:37:00,748

You know.

826

00:37:00,772--> 00:37:03,200

Because almost everything

827

00:37:03,200--> 00:37:05,348

I need is online.

828

00:37:05,372--> 00:37:07,348

I like being in my house.

829

00:37:07,372--> 00:37:11,200

Um, I can work on

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the go if I want to.

830

00:37:11,200--> 00:37:14,108

And look, it's not
that I avoid the library,

831

00:37:14,132--> 00:37:15,948

but I tend to do
raids, you know.

832

00:37:15,972--> 00:37:18,092

I think, oh gosh, I can't get...
you know, how annoying.

833

00:37:18,116--> 00:37:21,200

I can't get that online, so
then I'll go into the library.

834

00:37:21,200--> 00:37:24,668

But that... that
routine of my research

835

00:37:24,692--> 00:37:26,948

happening in the library,

836

00:37:26,972--> 00:37:29,200

that's gone completely.

837

00:37:29,200--> 00:37:31,468

I mean, I partly regret it,

838

00:37:31,492--> 00:37:34,200

because I had a whole
social life in the library.

839

00:37:34,200--> 00:37:37,388

It... it was my home, yeah.

840

00:37:37,412--> 00:37:39,748

Uh, particularly
when I was younger

841

00:37:39,772--> 00:37:42,348

and didn't have such a
nice home as I now have,

842

00:37:42,372--> 00:37:44,200

the library was where I was.

843

00:37:44,200--> 00:37:45,200

-Yeah.

844

00:37:45,200--> 00:37:46,268

-And that has now gone.

845

00:37:46,292--> 00:37:47,908

Um...

846

00:37:47,932--> 00:37:51,200

Do now things go

through different drafts?

847

00:37:51,200--> 00:37:55,108

Um, yes, but...

848

00:37:55,132--> 00:37:59,388

I suppose if I do

have a kind of routine,

849

00:37:59,412--> 00:38:00,948

I would...

850

00:38:00,972--> 00:38:03,828

When I'm coming to write a
chapter, and I do it chapter by chapter,

851

00:38:03,852--> 00:38:06,300

I start at the beginning and
I go on till I come to the end,

852

00:38:06,324--> 00:38:09,028

I would write

853

00:38:09,052--> 00:38:11,988

a plan of the chapter,
uh, in longhand,

854

00:38:12,012--> 00:38:14,200

in my little notebook, right?

855

00:38:14,200--> 00:38:17,108

And I'd put arrows, and I'd then

856

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00:38:17,132--> 00:38:18,548

scribble bits out.

857

00:38:18,572--> 00:38:21,200

And I'd... so I would...

858

00:38:21,200--> 00:38:22,200

I would get,

859

00:38:22,224--> 00:38:24,108

in longhand,

860

00:38:24,132--> 00:38:27,200

the kind of idea of what the
chapter was going to be about.

861

00:38:27,200--> 00:38:29,188

And there's somewhere,
somewhere behind this,

862

00:38:29,212--> 00:38:31,468

there's the idea of what
the book is going to be about.

863

00:38:31,492--> 00:38:33,948

That's very, kind
of behind, um...

864

00:38:33,972--> 00:38:38,708

But then, I would write
directly onto the screen

865

00:38:38,732--> 00:38:39,788

from that.

866

00:38:39,812--> 00:38:41,508

Sometimes when I
come to a difficult bit

867

00:38:41,532--> 00:38:43,588

or I think, oh my
god, it's going to go,

868

00:38:43,612--> 00:38:45,988

um, I will do a little
draft of a paragraph,

869

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00:38:46,012--> 00:38:47,228

which I think when I...

870

00:38:47,252--> 00:38:49,628

You know, when suddenly
you have a flash, you think,

871

00:38:49,652--> 00:38:51,492

this mustn't be the
gentleman from [inaudible],

872

00:38:51,516--> 00:38:53,200

I've got to get this
down on paper.

873

00:38:53,200--> 00:38:56,868

Um, so I... I occasionally
use a bit of longhand.

874

00:38:56,892--> 00:38:59,200

But mostly I'm doing
it on the screen.

875

00:38:59,200--> 00:39:01,668

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And I suppose I start every day

876

00:39:01,692--> 00:39:05,200

by reading what I've
written in that chapter before.

877

00:39:05,200--> 00:39:08,028

And some days, that really...

878

00:39:08,052--> 00:39:10,200

That institutes a...

879

00:39:10,200--> 00:39:12,348

a quite radical revision,

880

00:39:12,372--> 00:39:13,948

because you read
and you think, no,

881

00:39:13,972--> 00:39:15,200

that isn't what I want to say.

882

00:39:15,200--> 00:39:16,548

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And so...

883

00:39:16,572--> 00:39:19,028

so there's a gradual process

884

00:39:19,052--> 00:39:22,200

of rewriting until I

finish the chapter.

885

00:39:22,200--> 00:39:25,468

And then the same goes

for the book, you know,

886

00:39:25,492--> 00:39:27,188

that you start

from the beginning

887

00:39:27,212--> 00:39:29,348

and you do sometimes

see radical things,

888

00:39:29,372--> 00:39:32,348

like this is in the wrong place,

you need to know this before.

889

00:39:32,372--> 00:39:34,268

Um...

890

00:39:34,292--> 00:39:35,292

But...

891

00:39:35,316--> 00:39:36,708

it would be...

892

00:39:36,732--> 00:39:38,200

it would be hard to say

893

00:39:38,200--> 00:39:41,228

that I got draft A, and then

894

00:39:41,252--> 00:39:43,788

draft B, draft C.

895

00:39:43,812--> 00:39:45,548

They all merge into one another,

896

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00:39:45,572--> 00:39:47,028

though occasionally,

897

00:39:47,052--> 00:39:49,148

and I think I would

recommend this thoroughly,

898

00:39:49,172--> 00:39:53,548

if I think I'm going to maybe

make a lot of alterations,

899

00:39:53,572--> 00:39:55,828

I save a copy on the computer

900

00:39:55,852--> 00:39:59,200

before I start

deleting it, right?

901

00:39:59,200--> 00:40:01,268

Because there is nothing worse

902

00:40:01,292--> 00:40:03,588

than going back

and thinking "shit",

903

00:40:03,612--> 00:40:06,588

that was better than
this and I've lost it.

904

00:40:06,612--> 00:40:07,612

[laughs]

905

00:40:10,200--> 00:40:12,108

-Moving on now to social media,

906

00:40:12,132--> 00:40:14,948

and there's perhaps
something of an expectation.

907

00:40:14,972--> 00:40:18,200

Um, you are, of course, a media
commentator and broadcaster.

908

00:40:18,200--> 00:40:21,348

An expectation of authors to
become involved on social media

909

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00:40:21,372--> 00:40:24,200

and with that can

come a lot of potential,

910

00:40:24,200--> 00:40:28,068

an opportunity, but it also

has its dark, darker sides

911

00:40:28,092--> 00:40:29,228

and darker edges.

912

00:40:29,252--> 00:40:32,200

And this next question comes

from someone who's seen you and

913

00:40:32,200--> 00:40:36,388

wishes to celebrate how clam and

measured and reasonable you are

914

00:40:36,412--> 00:40:40,200

in your engagement

with people that perhaps,

915

00:40:40,200--> 00:40:42,668

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you know, um, not being...

916

00:40:42,692--> 00:40:45,200

not paying you that
dignity or respect in return.

917

00:40:45,200--> 00:40:48,228

Um, you invite discussion
rather than reacting,

918

00:40:48,252--> 00:40:50,828

um, to so called trolls.

919

00:40:50,852--> 00:40:53,468

How do you manage not
to react to awful people

920

00:40:53,492--> 00:40:54,748

with such incredible dignity?

921

00:40:54,772--> 00:40:57,200

And what's your
mechanism for peace?

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922

00:40:57,200--> 00:40:59,028

-A lot of practice.

It's take... I mean...

923

00:40:59,052--> 00:41:03,200

You know, I've had a long
history on social media.

924

00:41:03,200--> 00:41:07,788

And what I first did,

925

00:41:07,812--> 00:41:10,200

because this is
what you're told to do,

926

00:41:10,200--> 00:41:12,748

was that if somebody
is being very horrible,

927

00:41:12,772--> 00:41:14,200

uh, you block them.

928

00:41:14,200--> 00:41:16,588

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And you don't give them
the oxygen and publicity,

929

00:41:16,612--> 00:41:18,200

you block them.

930

00:41:18,200--> 00:41:19,708

And...

931

00:41:19,732--> 00:41:23,188

I did that for a bit and
it felt terribly frustrating,

932

00:41:23,212--> 00:41:25,908

because I thought,
look, this is silencing me!

933

00:41:25,932--> 00:41:28,988

You know, they're the bullies,

934

00:41:29,012--> 00:41:30,548

they're in charge
of the playground,

935

00:41:30,572--> 00:41:31,668

and I'm letting them be,

936

00:41:31,692--> 00:41:34,200

so I've got to find a way of...

937

00:41:34,200--> 00:41:37,668

of actually saying, no,

I don't see it like that.

938

00:41:37,692--> 00:41:41,228

Now, I would like to say

939

00:41:41,252--> 00:41:43,200

that there's never been, um...

940

00:41:43,200--> 00:41:47,428

times on social media when

I've, uh, really lost my rag,

941

00:41:47,452--> 00:41:49,908

and there have been and

it's always been a disaster.

942

00:41:49,932--> 00:41:51,308

You know, it's a...

943

00:41:51,332--> 00:41:55,988

If you feel that you're
about to be intemperate,

944

00:41:56,012--> 00:41:58,200

switch off.

945

00:41:58,200--> 00:42:01,348

So, what I've come to do

946

00:42:01,372--> 00:42:03,988

is to say, look,

947

00:42:04,012--> 00:42:06,308

if you go back and
read what I said

948

00:42:06,332--> 00:42:08,028

in that article or whatever,

949

00:42:08,052--> 00:42:11,200

I think you'll find it
wasn't as you say.

950

00:42:11,200--> 00:42:15,268

And this is the
material I'm drawing.

951

00:42:15,292--> 00:42:16,828

Doesn't mean... I mean, it's...

952

00:42:16,852--> 00:42:18,108

I'm afraid it's a bit,

953

00:42:18,132--> 00:42:20,200

kind of, sort of academic-y

954

00:42:20,200--> 00:42:22,788

and slightly patronising,

955

00:42:22,812--> 00:42:27,200

but I have to say, that

is not what I was arguing.

956

00:42:27,200--> 00:42:29,668

Actually, you need
to go and read this,

957

00:42:29,692--> 00:42:31,200

because it will show you.

958

00:42:31,200--> 00:42:34,148

Now, what has
happened with that is,

959

00:42:34,172--> 00:42:36,200

you know, I could not possibly

960

00:42:36,200--> 00:42:39,628

claim that, um, I've
had huge success

961

00:42:39,652--> 00:42:43,908

with all these vile people,
and there are vile people on X,

962

00:42:43,932--> 00:42:46,148

and goodness knows
what they are, right?

963

00:42:46,172--> 00:42:48,948

There're not quite as many
vile people as we think,

964

00:42:48,972--> 00:42:52,200

because quite a lot of
the people who appear vile

965

00:42:52,200--> 00:42:55,828

are actually a bit drunk,
a bit sad, a bit upset,

966

00:42:55,852--> 00:42:58,200

and haven't got anyone
to sound off to.

967

00:42:58,200--> 00:43:01,948

And sometimes, you
come back to them.

968

00:43:01,972--> 00:43:05,200

And, I mean, I remember
once somebody said

969

00:43:05,200--> 00:43:08,668

in reply, "you're right,
I've gone back to look

970

00:43:08,692--> 00:43:10,200

and that isn't what you said.

971

00:43:10,200--> 00:43:11,868

I'm terribly sorry.

972

00:43:11,892--> 00:43:15,200

I've just come out of hospital
from a bypass operation.

973

00:43:15,200--> 00:43:19,788

I'm a retired policeman and
I'm really keen on history,

974

00:43:19,812--> 00:43:22,828

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and we have a little club at our
pub in Glasgow every Tuesday,

975

00:43:22,852--> 00:43:24,200

so if you'd like to come,

976

00:43:24,200--> 00:43:25,388

please do.

977

00:43:25,412--> 00:43:29,200

And I thought. Somehow...

978

00:43:29,200--> 00:43:31,868

But, you know,

it's the minority, but

979

00:43:31,892--> 00:43:34,188

there are people who...

980

00:43:34,212--> 00:43:36,868

I mean, everybody's

allowed to have an off day

981

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00:43:36,892--> 00:43:39,588

and having an off day with
a keyboard in front of you

982

00:43:39,612--> 00:43:41,200

tends to bring trouble.

983

00:43:41,200--> 00:43:44,068

But sometimes people
are prepared to say,

984

00:43:44,092--> 00:43:46,200

yeah, I'm sorry, I
shouldn't have said that.

985

00:43:46,200--> 00:43:48,068

And that makes
you feel quite good.

986

00:43:48,092--> 00:43:50,200

You get friends that way.

987

00:43:50,200--> 00:43:52,588

-Something completely

different now.

988

00:43:52,612--> 00:43:55,428

Just wondering how you pick
your subject for the next book?

989

00:43:56,200--> 00:43:58,868

-Um, uhh....

990

00:43:58,892--> 00:44:01,388

I wish I could say
I kind of sit down

991

00:44:01,412--> 00:44:03,588

and I think, what would I
like to write about now?

992

00:44:03,612--> 00:44:05,508

But usually, somehow,

993

00:44:05,532--> 00:44:07,200

some kind of obligation
has happened.

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994

00:44:07,200--> 00:44:09,188

You know, a publisher--

You know, you've had...

995

00:44:09,212--> 00:44:11,228

Even with a writer,

996

00:44:11,252--> 00:44:14,200

I still had a tax bill

that I couldn't pay.

997

00:44:14,200--> 00:44:16,188

And it was kind of easy...

998

00:44:16,212--> 00:44:18,348

The easiest way of doing

that was to sign a contract.

999

00:44:18,372--> 00:44:20,588

And then you've got

to write the book, right?

1000

00:44:20,612--> 00:44:22,200

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So it's, you know,
it's never a way out.

1001

00:44:22,200--> 00:44:24,588

Um, so...

1002

00:44:24,612--> 00:44:26,828

I usually find...

1003

00:44:26,852--> 00:44:29,200

There must be some agency
on my part in here, you know.

1004

00:44:29,200--> 00:44:32,748

I'm not signing a contract
to write, you know,

1005

00:44:32,772--> 00:44:36,200

Sex in the Ancient
World fully illustrated.

1006

00:44:36,200--> 00:44:37,908

Um, you know, I'm doing...

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1007

00:44:37,932--> 00:44:40,668

I'm signing up to what
sort of I'd want to do,

1008

00:44:40,692--> 00:44:42,200

but it then comes to feel

1009

00:44:42,200--> 00:44:43,948

as if it's something that I...

1010

00:44:43,972--> 00:44:46,200

I have to do, and often...

1011

00:44:46,200--> 00:44:48,348

Um, and you have
to watch for this.

1012

00:44:48,372--> 00:44:49,808

You know, when
you get to be my age,

1013

00:44:49,832--> 00:44:50,988

you go and give lectures.

1014

00:44:51,012--> 00:44:53,108

Yeah, it'll be nice, you

know, three lectures on this

1015

00:44:53,132--> 00:44:55,200

and university is

somewhere nice.

1016

00:44:55,200--> 00:44:59,388

Um, and you sort

of don't quite realize,

1017

00:44:59,412--> 00:45:00,868

though you have seen,

1018

00:45:00,892--> 00:45:03,028

that also the fee

includes an obligation

1019

00:45:03,052--> 00:45:05,200

to publish the

bloody things, right?

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1020

00:45:05,200--> 00:45:07,308

Um, and so there's...

1021

00:45:07,332--> 00:45:12,200

There's that
element. I... I don't feel

1022

00:45:12,200--> 00:45:15,548

that I'm sitting here thinking,
hmm, what shall I do?

1023

00:45:15,572--> 00:45:17,188

Now, I think maybe
that's quite good.

1024

00:45:17,212--> 00:45:19,200

I'm not sure that
writers who sit and think,

1025

00:45:19,200--> 00:45:21,708

well, what would I like
to sound off about next

1026

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00:45:21,732--> 00:45:24,428

necessarily write

the best books,

1027

00:45:24,452--> 00:45:27,108

and I think that, you know,

there is a kind of sense that,

1028

00:45:27,132--> 00:45:30,708

um, you know, I'm still

a bit of a student at heart

1029

00:45:30,732--> 00:45:32,268

and I write a book...

1030

00:45:32,292--> 00:45:36,200

I write the book I'm told to, like I

used to write the essay I was told to.

1031

00:45:36,200--> 00:45:38,748

And maybe that brings

out the best in me.

1032

00:45:38,772--> 00:45:40,200

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[laughs]

1033

00:45:40,200--> 00:45:43,908

-And just to bring, uh, as
we approach the close...

1034

00:45:43,932--> 00:45:46,508

Um, "thank you", I thought
this was an appropriate one.

1035

00:45:46,532--> 00:45:48,868

"Thank you for sharing
how your writing day begins.

1036

00:45:48,892--> 00:45:50,868

Can you also share
how and when it ends?"

1037

00:45:52,200--> 00:45:54,200

-Um, I'm terribly sorry,
I'm gonna have to...

1038

00:45:54,200--> 00:45:55,308

-Glass of wine.

1039

00:45:55,332--> 00:45:59,200

-It is a glass of wine,
and the question is...

1040

00:45:59,200--> 00:46:01,868

At what stage is the
glass of wine comes?

1041

00:46:01,892--> 00:46:06,200

Because... You think

1042

00:46:06,200--> 00:46:08,548

maybe half past 5 is coming up,

1043

00:46:08,572--> 00:46:10,188

and you think, I don't know,

1044

00:46:10,212--> 00:46:11,788

I've got to write
one more paragraph.

1045

00:46:11,812--> 00:46:14,200

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Perhaps I'll have a glass
of wine and it will help.

1046

00:46:14,200--> 00:46:17,228

Well, half a glass
of wine does help.

1047

00:46:17,252--> 00:46:20,200

One glass of wine,

1048

00:46:20,200--> 00:46:22,388

pretty much on the cusp.

1049

00:46:22,412--> 00:46:25,548

As soon as you've had anything
more than one glass of wine,

1050

00:46:25,572--> 00:46:26,572

forget it.

1051

00:46:26,596--> 00:46:28,188

So, it's a kind of...

1052

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00:46:28,900--> 00:46:33,200

There's a, uh, an attempt to

1053

00:46:33,200--> 00:46:34,668

calibrate, um,

1054

00:46:34,692--> 00:46:37,148

what I think I still want to do

1055

00:46:37,172--> 00:46:40,200

with an excuse to

give up for the day.

1056

00:46:40,200--> 00:46:42,188

It's hard. It's hard.

1057

00:46:42,212--> 00:46:44,200

And I suppose it's terrible.

I mean, I think that...

1058

00:46:44,200--> 00:46:50,200

Um, you know, doctors and psychotherapists,

et cetera, would question this

1059

00:46:50,200--> 00:46:53,308

very pointedly as a way of

1060

00:46:53,332--> 00:46:56,200

using alcohol as

a way to stop work.

1061

00:46:56,200--> 00:46:57,828

It's not very good,

1062

00:46:57,852--> 00:46:59,628

but I'm afraid it's true.

1063

00:46:59,900--> 00:47:02,788

-Absolutely. Thank you so much for
being so generous with your thoughts.

1064

00:47:02,812--> 00:47:05,988

I will just wrap up and
sorry for keeping you.

1065

00:47:06,012--> 00:47:08,468

Um, I would just urge everyone,

1066

00:47:08,492--> 00:47:10,068

we will be sharing
the chat with Mary,

1067

00:47:10,092--> 00:47:12,708

so please do, um, show
your appreciation in the chat.

1068

00:47:12,732--> 00:47:15,800

That'd be very lovely, just in case
you haven't seen it, that'll go out live.

1069

00:47:15,824--> 00:47:17,188

Um, we just had a plea here.

1070

00:47:17,212--> 00:47:19,628

Please, would you go
on to Bluesky or Threads.

1071

00:47:19,652--> 00:47:22,400

I've left Twitter, as so many have
and I miss you all on the socials.

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1072

00:47:22,424--> 00:47:25,628

-Can I say, I'm also on

Blue Sky, but I don't have...

1073

00:47:25,652--> 00:47:26,652

-Oh, right.

1074

00:47:26,676--> 00:47:30,200

-So, but I... I'm... I'm

partly on the way there.

1075

00:47:30,200--> 00:47:31,828

-Fantastic.

1076

00:47:31,852--> 00:47:35,200

Um, okay, so I would

just like to say a big thank you

1077

00:47:35,200--> 00:47:37,988

to Mary and ask you

to join me in doing so,

1078

00:47:38,012--> 00:47:40,068

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or should I say gratias tibi ago

1079

00:47:40,092--> 00:47:41,828

for joining me

for today's event,

1080

00:47:41,852--> 00:47:46,200

and thank you, um, thank

you, yeah, for you, for... yeah.

1081

00:47:46,200--> 00:47:48,748

Um, thank you to

Lilly for moderating,

1082

00:47:48,772--> 00:47:50,108

she's been absolutely brilliant.

1083

00:47:50,132--> 00:47:53,076

She's been responsible for all
the links going out in the chat.

1084

00:47:53,100--> 00:47:54,308

If you've enjoyed this event

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1085

00:47:54,332--> 00:47:56,828

and aren't yet a member
of the Society of Authors,

1086

00:47:56,852--> 00:47:58,828

please do consider
joining our community

1087

00:47:58,852--> 00:48:01,828

with our special
#SoAatHome offer,

1088

00:48:01,852--> 00:48:04,200

and you will get 20% off for
the first year of membership.

1089

00:48:04,200--> 00:48:08,588

And use the code "SOAATHOME20".

1090

00:48:08,612--> 00:48:13,388

Our next #SoAatHome event
takes place on Tuesday next week

1091

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00:48:13,412--> 00:48:15,200

with a Professional

Development on pensions.

1092

00:48:15,200--> 00:48:19,548

For more, head to

societyofauthors.org/events

1093

00:48:19,572--> 00:48:21,200

to book or check out

our events program.

1094

00:48:21,200--> 00:48:27,200

A reminder that the SoA

event is free to all, um,

1095

00:48:27,200--> 00:48:29,028

and if you can't afford to,

1096

00:48:29,052--> 00:48:31,988

please consider donating to our

Society of Authors Access Fund

1097

00:48:32,012--> 00:48:34,200

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where we suggest a
minimum donation of £5.

1098

00:48:34,200--> 00:48:37,668

You can also help the
Society of Authors Access Fund

1099

00:48:37,692--> 00:48:40,188

by making a purchase
on our virtual bookstore,

1100

00:48:40,212--> 00:48:41,212

on Bookshop.org

1101

00:48:41,236--> 00:48:43,628

where you can find
books by writers taking part

1102

00:48:43,652--> 00:48:46,148

in the SoA at Home
events programme.

1103

00:48:46,172--> 00:48:48,300

And Mary's book is up

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there, I checked this morning.

1104

00:48:48,324--> 00:48:50,148

Another big thank you to Mary

1105

00:48:50,172--> 00:48:51,828

and all of you that

have joined us today,

1106

00:48:51,852--> 00:48:55,200

and let's continue this

conversation on social media,

1107

00:48:55,200--> 00:48:56,748

Threads, Bluesky, if you will,

1108

00:48:56,772--> 00:49:00,200

with the festival

hashtag #SoAatHome.

1109

00:49:00,200--> 00:49:03,188

And just a couple more

hours till, uh, 5 o'clock, so...

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1110

00:49:03,212--> 00:49:05,668

[laughter]

1111

00:49:05,692--> 00:49:07,028

So there we are.

-Half 5.

1112

00:49:07,052--> 00:49:10,068

-Mary, I will... I will send...

I'll have one for you

1113

00:49:10,092--> 00:49:11,200

and just...

1114

00:49:11,200--> 00:49:13,588

Very, very many thanks, this

has been absolutely wonderful

1115

00:49:13,612--> 00:49:15,108

and it's such a

privilege, as I say.

1116

00:49:15,132--> 00:49:17,997

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Um, you've been so generous with
your time and your thoughts, and, yeah.

1117

00:49:18,021--> 00:49:22,028

-And I shall be on social media,
so do ask questions if you want.

1118

00:49:22,052--> 00:49:25,264

-Thank you so much.